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WILL SHORTEN STAND UP TO UNIONS?

John Lloyd, Director, Work Reform and Productivity Unit at the Institute of Public Affairs said today that, "Bill Shorten is presented with an excellent opportunity to prove himself as a minister who is not dictated to by the unions. The Australian workplace relations system requires substantial reform and he may be the man to do it."

It is sometimes said that a minister with inside experience can bring unexpected and lasting change to a portfolio. A good 'insider' minister will use knowledge and credibility to push change beyond expected boundaries.

Bill Shorten is now presented with such an opportunity.

He has been a prominent union official rising in 2001 to the job of National Secretary of Australia's oldest union, the Australian Workers' Union.

It is clear that the Australian workplace relations system is plagued by problems. Reform in a number of areas is required. A failure by Mr Shorten to introduce changes will damage Australian workers and the economy.

Mr Lloyd called on Mr Shorten to undertake five key reform steps as a matter of urgency:

- a. Allow individual flexibility arrangements to operate as intended by removing the capacity of unions to constrain their use;
- b. Transfer the regulation of independent contracting from workplace relations laws to commercial law;
- c. Withdraw the Bill that would abolish the Australian Building and Construction Commissioner;
- d. Restore right of entry for union officials to workplaces to the 2007 election policy position; and
- e. Revise bargaining rules to avoid protracted negotiations and industrial action.

Mr Lloyd said, "Australia's reputation is suffering through a re-emergence of union militancy combined with a complex and inflexible workplace relations system. Mr Shorten portrays himself as someone who understands business challenges as well as union factions. He now has a chance to deliver a system suited to a multifaceted economy operating in a highly competitive world. A system reflecting union dogma based in the 1970s will not grow jobs and investment."

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